

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Khadijah's feminism and polygamy in cinema: A re-examination of gender equality in Islam and Indonesian film

Ririe Rengganis^{1*} , Putri Retnosari² , & M. Erwan Saing³ ¹ Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia² Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia³ Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia***Corresponding Author**ririerengganis@unesa.ac.id**ABSTRACT**

Research on polygamy in Indonesian cinema has largely been dominated by Western feminist perspectives and moral-sociological approaches, often overlooking the progressive theological dimensions embedded within Islamic teachings. Yet Islam offers the exemplary figure of Khadijah Ra. bint Khuwaylid, whose life embodies ethical leadership, economic autonomy, and gender justice. This study formulates the concept of “Khadijah Feminism” as a theological-ethical framework and examines the representation of women and polygamy in four Indonesian films: *Berbagi Suami* (2006), *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015), *Madu Murni* (2023), and *1 Imam 2 Makmum* (2025). Employing Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis, the research integrates textual-narrative analysis, cinematographic interpretation, and Islamic feminist hermeneutics through the ethical lens of Khadijah. The findings demonstrate that most films continue to reproduce patriarchal religious discourses by portraying women’s patience and obedience as the primary indicators of piety while marginalizing Khadijah’s model of agency, justice, and moral leadership. In contrast, *Madu Murni* and *Berbagi Suami* present female protagonists who challenge patriarchal norms through economic independence, ethical reasoning, and resistance to injustice. Furthermore, polygamy is predominantly represented as a male privilege rather than as a morally accountable institution constrained by the Qur’anic principles of justice articulated in An-Nisa (4):3 and (4):129. This study contributes to Islamic feminist scholarship by introducing “Khadijah Feminism” as an alternative analytical framework that integrates faith, gender equality, and spiritual agency, while recommending more theologically grounded and ethically responsible representations of Muslim women in contemporary Indonesian cinema.

Keywords: islamic feminism; gender equality; poligamy; Indonesian cinema.**ARTICLE HISTORY**

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'feminism' is often associated with Western movements that are perceived as conflicting with religious faith in Indonesian public discourse. The word 'feminist' is used with a tone of suspicion in various social spheres, such as religious outreach forums, educational institutions and social media. Some people view feminism as an ideology that encourages women to rebel against men, threatens domestic harmony and defies the natural order (Grosz, 1994; Hooks, 2000). This view arises from a fragmented and limited understanding, which sees feminism merely as a product of Western liberalism and secularism. In reality, however, feminism is an intellectual and moral movement that champions justice, freedom, and the equality of human dignity (Budianta, 2018; Mulvey, 1999; Wibisono, 2020). These values have existed within Islamic teachings since the time of the Prophet Muhammad Saw., as evidenced by the thought of Aisyah Taymuniah in the early 20th century, who introduced the term 'feminism' within Islam (Suryorini, 2012; Shihab, 2002; Maknun & Zakaria, 2025).

Islam has promoted gender equality by emphasising justice (*'adl*) and compassion (*rahmah*) as its core principles. Khadijah Ra. bint Khuwailid, the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad Saw., is a figure who embodied these values in practice. As an intelligent, independent, and generous woman who ran a trading business in Mecca, Khadijah Ra. actually decided to propose to the Prophet Muhammad Saw. based on her prospective husband's moral and spiritual integrity—an act that went beyond the gender norms of Arab society at the time (Indana, 2018; Fakhri, 2013; Nopriani & Distiyana, 2020). The Prophet Muhammad Saw. and Khadijah Ra. lived a monogamous life of mutual respect and love throughout their twenty-five-year marriage. The figure of Khadijah Ra. proves that, from the very beginning of Islam, women were permitted to be independent moral, spiritual, and social agents.

However, portrayals of empowered Muslim women such as Khadijah Ra. are rarely found in modern popular culture, particularly in films. Instead, women are often cast in subordinate roles in various media representations. In Indonesian films about polygamy such as *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015), *Madu Murni* (2023), *1 Imam 2 Makmum* (2025), and *Berbagi Suami* (2006), a similar narrative pattern emerges: men remain responsible for moral and spiritual decisions, whilst women are expected to accept polygamy as a test of piety. Women's patience and sacrifice are portrayed as a form of the purity of faith, whilst the aspect of justice—which should be at the heart of Islamic teachings—is instead neglected. This phenomenon demonstrates that films not only serve as representations of

society but also generate new religious discourses that subtly reinforce the patriarchal system.

Research into gender representation in Indonesian cinema has been conducted by several academics. Ahmadi et al. (2025) examined how Indonesian films portray the identities of Muslim women and found that cinematic representations tend to reinforce dominant narratives regarding women's compliance. In a more relevant context, Kusumaningtyas (2020) conducted a critical analysis of five Indonesian religious films (*Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*, *Ummi Aminah*, and *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan*) using a gender perspective. This research demonstrates that these diverse films introduce universal Islamic values such as gender equality and women's rights, yet also highlight how narratives of polygamy in films are often portrayed as 'emergency' situations that are difficult to realise without inviting other issues, such as the inability to act fairly, as emphasised in QS. An-Nisa: 129. Furthermore, several studies on polygamy films in Indonesia employ Western feminist theory or socio-moral analysis without exploring the progressive theological dimensions of Islam. The Western feminist approach is often considered not entirely relevant as it overlooks the spiritual and cultural context of Muslims, whilst socio-moral analysis tends to be descriptive without a normative foundation rooted within the Islamic tradition itself.

Although previous studies have made important contributions, there remains a significant gap: no research has yet systematically employed an Islamic feminist framework—such as those developed by Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2002)—to analyse the representation of women and polygamy in Indonesian cinema. Yet, these two thinkers offer a hermeneutics of justice that enables a reinterpretation of both sacred texts and popular cultural texts from a perspective of gender equality rooted in Islamic tradition. In other words, a critical approach that combines progressive Islamic theology and film studies remains rare in the academic literature in Indonesia.

The primary contribution of this research aims to bridge this gap through two strategic objectives: to develop a sharp cultural critique of the conventions of Indonesian religious cinema, whilst simultaneously rehabilitating the active agency of the figure of Khadijah Ra. as a theological-ethical framework. This research does not merely reconstruct the biography of Khadijah Ra. in a romanticised manner, but rather transforms it into an operational methodology of Islamic feminist hermeneutics to dismantle patriarchal biases in the cinema.

In light of this gap, this study aims to address three main questions. First, how can the figure of Khadijah Ra. be positioned as a paradigm of Islamic feminism in the context of gender justice? Second, how are the representations of women and polygamy in the films *Berbagi Suami* (2006), *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015), *Madu Murni* (2023), and *1 Imam 2 Makmum* (2025) analysed from an Islamic feminist perspective? Third, how can a reinterpretation of the discourse on polygamy through an Islamic feminist perspective reintroduce the values of justice (*'adl*) and compassion (*rahmah*) into Indonesian popular culture? In line with these questions, this study aims to examine the figure of Khadijah Ra. as a paradigm of Islamic feminism within the context of gender justice, to analyse the representation of women and polygamy in these four films, and to offer a reinterpretation of the discourse on polygamy so that the values of justice and compassion inherent in Islamic teachings may be reintroduced into popular culture. To achieve these objectives, the theoretical framework of this paper is situated at a crucial epistemological tension between the emancipatory essence of Islamic feminism, the hegemony of patriarchal culture, and the commodification of popular media (Azhari, 2021; Ibrahim, 2017). Consequently, the epistemological framework in this study integrates two main pillars in an interdisciplinary manner.

The first pillar is Islamic feminism as articulated by Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2002). Islamic feminism emerged as a response to two extremes: on the one hand, patriarchy that oppresses women in the name of religion; and on the other, secular Western feminism that often disregards the spiritual and cultural context of Islam. According to Wadud (1999), Islam is not theologically patriarchal; what is patriarchal are the interpretations and social practices shaped by male interpreters over the centuries. Wadud emphasises that the Qur'an must be read through the hermeneutics of justice, an approach that places the principles of justice (*'adl*) and human equality (*musawah*) as the primary foundations of interpretation. Wadud divides the reading of the Qur'an into three layers: linguistic and semantic analysis of the verses, the historical context in which the verses were revealed, and the universal message of justice that applies across time and place.

Meanwhile, Barlas (2002) asserts that Islam does not support patriarchy because the Qur'an rejects all forms of servitude other than to Allah Swt. In her view, patriarchy is a form of epistemological shirk (associating partners with Allah Swt. in knowledge), as it presents men as having absolute power over women, whereas only Allah Swt. the Almighty possesses the highest moral and spiritual authority. Both figures affirm the four main principles of Islamic feminism, namely justice (*'adl*) as the core of Islamic teaching, mutuality between

men and women in social and spiritual relations, women's free will (agency) as moral subjects, and the rejection of gender hierarchies derived from human interpretation, not from God. In this study, these four principles will be used as normative criteria for analysing the film's narrative and visuals.

Secondly, this study draws upon Hall's (1997) theory of representation and Mulvey's (1975) concept of the male gaze, which has been expanded to include the religious male gaze. Hall (1977) argues that representation is not merely a reflection of reality, but a process of constructing meaning through language, images and narrative. Film does not represent the world as it is; it shapes social reality through the selection, arrangement, and emphasis of certain ideas (Barthes, 1977). Mulvey argues that in mainstream cinema, women are depicted as objects of the male gaze, both in visual (camera) and narrative structures, whilst men become active subjects. In the context of Indonesian films on polygamy, the concept of the male gaze is expanded into the 'religious male gaze'—a religious perspective that, both visually and narratively, positions men as the centre of spiritual power, whilst women are portrayed as symbols of piety through suffering.

Dimensions of Analysis	Islamic Feminism (Wadud Barlas)	Khadijah's Feminism (Operationalisation)	The Theory of Representation (Hall & Mulvey)	Research Focus
Value Basis	Justice mutuality, compassion ('adl), and	Independence, moral courage, partnership on equal terms with one's husband	Ideology, imagery, camera angles	Reading cinema as a social interpretation of Islamic texts
Moral Subject	Men and women are equal before Allah Swt.	Khadijah Ra. as a fully-fledged moral agent who determines her own destiny	The male subject as the centre of the gaze	Women as moral subjects, not visual objects
Power Relations	Equal relationship based on love	Equal between relationship Khadijah Ra. and the Prophet Muhammad Saw.: monogamy, mutual respect, partnership in da'wah	Representation of male power through narrative and visuals	Identifying the symbolic dominance of patriarchy
Hermeneutical Objectives	Restoring Islam to the spirit of justice	Making Khadijah Ra. as a concrete role model for Muslim women today	Reading films as ideological cultural texts	Creating a new interpretation of gender justice

Table 1. Theoretical Synthesis: Integration of Islamic Feminism and Film Studies

The operationalisation of this framework in film analysis will be carried out by observing four aspects: who speaks and makes decisions in key scenes, how the camera positions men and women, how dialogue legitimises men's decisions, and how the narrative rewards or punishes characters who resist injustice. This integration of Islamic feminism

and film studies reinforces the research position that film analysis cannot be separated from the theological and social contexts that surround it. Film, in this instance, is not merely a space for cultural representation, but also a living and dynamic space for religious interpretation (Barker, 2012).

This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of film and gender studies within the context of Muslim societies, as well as a practical contribution to filmmakers and media analysts in producing representations that are more aligned with justice and gender equality. More specifically, this research also presents the figure of Khadijah Ra. not merely as a historical figure, but as a symbolic framework for Islamic feminism: a fusion of faith, intelligence, and independence that can serve as an alternative representation of Muslim women in Indonesian cinema. By combining the hermeneutics of Islamic feminism with film discourse analysis, this article seeks to demonstrate that Islam itself provides a sufficiently strong moral and spiritual foundation for the emergence of gender equality—a foundation that has long been marginalised by mainstream interpretations and popular culture. Thus, this research aims not only to critique patriarchal representational practices in film but also to demonstrate that Islam itself provides a sufficiently strong moral and spiritual foundation for the emergence of gender equality. Khadijah's feminism, rooted in faith, intelligence, and independence, is a model of cultural resistance that can inspire Indonesian cinema to be more committed to justice and humanity.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in Norman Fairclough's *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA), integrated interdisciplinarily with Metz's Film Semiotics (1974) and Islamic feminist hermeneutics (Wadud, 1999), focusing on the figure of Khadijah Ra. as a paradigm of gender justice. This approach was chosen because the subject of study is a multisemiotic (Barthes, 1977) audio-visual text (cinema) and theological discourse that intertwine to form gender ideology in the public sphere. The process of reading Islamic feminist hermeneutics and the film's units of analysis is carried out through a layered reconstruction of cinematic signs.

Tables, figures, and graphs should be numbered consecutively, cited in the text, and placed as close as possible to their first citation. All visual elements must be centered and accompanied by concise, informative captions. Large tables or figures may span the full page width and should be positioned at the top or bottom of the page to maintain readability.

In accordance with Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model, the analysis proceeds simultaneously across three levels, integrated with Wadud's (1999) hermeneutic reading method. At the first level, namely textual analysis, the unit under analysis is broken down into syntagmatic codes such as narrative structure, dialogue, and presuppositions, as well as cinematographic codes based on Metz's (1974) semiotics, such as shot size (close-ups for emotion, long shots for isolation), camera angle (high angle to demean women's position), lighting (chiaroscuro for inner turmoil), and diegetic sound. At this textual level, linguistic analysis is refined using Wadud's hermeneutic method through three aspects of textual language: the text within its context when dialogue or verses are quoted; the syntax of the text that positions the female subject within the sentence; and the text's overarching principle (*weltanschauung*) to trace how religious jargon regarding polygamy is articulated by the characters.

Furthermore, in the second dimension—discursive practice—the analysis focuses on the interdiscursivity of discourse regarding how the film text combines conventional classical fiqh discourse, pop psychology, media industrial capitalism, and Islamic feminist resistance in the process of text production and consumption. In this dimension, the interpretation is confronted with a re-reading of religious texts that emphasise equality or the doctrine of *tawhid* according to Wadud, so that the researcher can distinguish between the filmmakers' patriarchal bias and the universal intent of the religious text, and then test this against the emancipatory and independent values reflected in the figure of Khadijah Ra. as the ideal benchmark for marital relationships.

Meanwhile, in the third dimension—social practice—the analysis focuses on identifying how the film's representations reinforce or challenge the hegemony of patriarchal institutions and construct "market piety" within contemporary Indonesian sociocultural contexts. The explanation at this stage evaluates whether the social structures depicted in the films perpetuate gender inequality through a CDA lens, whilst also examining the extent to which the spiritual-social relevance of the Khadijah Ra. paradigm is adopted, ignored, or deconstructed by contemporary society for the sake of the industry.

The primary data for this study consists of four Indonesian films on the theme of polygamy, selected purposively based on thematic relevance and religious context, namely *Berbagi Suami* (2006) by Nia Dinata; *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015) by Hanung Bramantyo; *Madu Murni* (2023) by Teddy Soeriaatmadja; and *1 Imam 2 Makmum* (2025) by Key Mangunsong. These four films represent a diverse spectrum, ranging from an urban-

feminist film (*Berbagi Suami*), a conventional religious film (*Surga yang Tak Dirindukan*), a social satire (*Madu Murni*), to a contemporary film that attempts to blend religious values with modern psychology (*1 Imam 2 Makmum*). Secondary data consists of religious texts, Qur'anic exegesis, and scholarly literature relevant to the theory of Islamic feminism and media representation (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002; Mernissi, 1991); academic articles, books on film theory, as well as previous research on films with a polygamy theme in Indonesia.

Data collection was carried out through a literature review and film observation, whilst data analysis was conducted using a circular-interdisciplinary approach that simultaneously combined the frameworks of CDA and Islamic hermeneutics. The analysis began with a textual description comprising a linguistic analysis of the film's dialogue and Metz's cinematographic codes, followed by an interpretation of discursive practices through Wadud's hermeneutic reading to examine the context, the grammar of religious dialogue, and the interdiscursivity of the discourse on polygamy in the film. The next stage involves the explanation of social practices to dissect the patriarchal power relations operating behind the scenes, where all these findings are ultimately critically confronted and synthesised with the gender justice paradigm embodied by the figure of Khadijah Ra. This final step serves as a tool for feminist theological critique to formulate how the transformation of virtual space representations in Indonesian religious cinema constructs or deconstructs the meaning of gender justice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presents the results of a critical discourse analysis (CDA) using Fairclough's (1995) model and Islamic feminist hermeneutics applied to four Indonesian films on the theme of polygamy, namely *Berbagi Suami* (2006), *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015), *Madu Murni* (2023), and *1 Imam 2 Makmum* (2025). The analysis was conducted through three dimensions of CDA: text analysis (narrative, dialogue, cinematography), discourse practices (interdiscursivity of fiqh, psychology, economics, and film genre), and social practices (power relations and gender ideology within Indonesian Muslim society). These were then interpreted within an Islamic moral and theological framework grounded in the values of *'adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *musawah* (equality), as outlined in the theories of Islamic feminism by Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2002).



Figure 1. Screenshot from a scene in the film *Berbagi Suami* (2006)

This approach yields three main findings: (1) Indonesian films tend to reproduce patriarchal interpretations of polygamy by portraying women as objects of patience. This is demonstrated through the following screenshot from the film *Berbagi Suami* (2006). Based on this screenshot (figure 1), the discourse on polygamy demonstrates that patriarchal power relations are indeed real. At the level of textual analysis (Fairclough, 1995), the use of a high-angle camera shot on the wife visually reinforces gender hierarchy. At the level of discourse practice, this film combines traditional fiqh discourse (polygamy as a man's right) with religious melodrama that frames inequality as a test of faith. For instance, women are dominated by men due to economic factors, and patriarchal ideology/hegemony is used as a tool to control wives. This aligns with the concept of the 'religious male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975), which demonstrates that Indonesian cinema frequently positions men as the centre of both spiritual and visual power.

Finding (2) indicates that only a small proportion of films resist the dominant discourse by portraying women as subjects of moral consciousness. In line with this finding, evidence is found in the film *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015).



Figure 2. Screenshot from a scene in the film *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015).

Citra Arini appears silent, not directly opposing her husband Prasetya's decision to remarry Mei Rose. Within patriarchal discourse, a woman's silence is often interpreted as

resignation or weakness. As seen in the screenshot (Figure 3), this sorrow takes the form of a smile. Furthermore, finding (3) – an interpretation of Islamic feminism – opens up an alternative space for understanding polygamy not as a licence, but as a test of justice that is difficult to realise, thereby positioning monogamy as a higher form of piety. This is evident in the following scene from *Madu Murni* (2023).



Figure 3. Screenshot from a scene in the Film *Madu Murni* (2023).

The clip shows that the decision to practise polygamy was not taken solely out of the husband's selfish desire, but was motivated by the needs of the children and the hope that, by marrying again, the family's need for more offspring could be fulfilled. This subsequently gives rise to conflict, consequences and other issues that arise following polygamy. The film *Madu Murni* (2023) provides a platform for Murni (the main character) as a moral subject. Murni refuses alimony that she considers haram, and assesses the decision to practise polygamy from a religious and ethical perspective, rather than passively accepting it. Within the framework of Islamic feminism, this constitutes a form of cultural *ijtihad* (Wadud, 2006).

Representations of Women in Films on the Theme of Polygamy

Film Title	Director and Year	Main Narrative	Women's Position	Ideological Message
<i>Berbagi Suami</i>	Nia Dinata, 2006	Three women from different social classes polygamy face	The realise women the injustice and fight back	Social critique of patriarchal structures
<i>Surga yang Tak Dirindukan</i>	Hanung Bramantyo, 2015	The devout Citra Arini accepts her husband's polygamy	Patient and passive women	Legitimasi moral atas poligami
<i>Madu Murni</i>	Teddy Soeriaatmadja, 2023	"Sharia-compliant" polygamy leads to moral and economic conflict	Rational and independent women	Criticism of religious hypocrisy
<i>1 Imam 2 Makmum</i>	Key Mangunsong, 2025	A widower remarries, haunted by the memory of his first wife	Women as victims of an emotional dilemma	Polygamy as a psychological drama for men

Table 2. Representations of Women and Polygamy in Indonesian Films.

Three distinct stories linked by the theme of polygamy are woven together in the film *Berbagi Suami* (2006). The three female protagonists—Salma (the doctor's wife), Siti (the obedient young wife) and Ming (a Chinese woman)—face the reality of injustice within polygamous households. Nia Dinata discusses polygamy as a social structure that normalises gender inequality rather than as a personal moral issue. The women here are aware of the injustice they experience, even if they are not always able to openly resist it.

Salma's dialogue, stating, "Women can choose, but are often not given the opportunity," reflects the principle of Islamic feminism: women as moral agents possessing free will (agency). The film deconstructs the meaning of obedience by portraying women who think critically without losing their faith. Within the hermeneutics of Islamic feminism, **Berbagi Suami** serves as an example of cultural *ijtihad*—that is, a creative interpretation of Islamic values of justice through the medium of cinema. This is evidenced by the attached screenshot, which illustrates that there is no room for women to be critical, or to exercise free will over the destiny conceived within the religion, as follows.



Figure 4. Screenshot from a scene in the film *Berbagi Suami* (2006).

The film *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* (2015) is the most popular representation of polygamy cloaked in religiosity. When her husband (Fedi Nuril) remarries another woman, Citra Arini (Laudya Cynthia Bella), the devout first wife, is portrayed as sincerely accepting the situation. In the film's narrative, emotional and spiritual justice are disregarded, and Arini's patience and acceptance are portrayed as the highest level of faith. Critical discourse analysis reveals that this film reproduces a patriarchal interpretation of religion: men are depicted as imams possessing the moral authority to make decisions, whilst women are portrayed as congregants who must not question.

This aligns with the concept of the 'religious male gaze' (a concept developed in this article): the camera and narrative view the world from a male spiritual perspective. The film deviates from the message of the Qur'an because disregards the principle of justice from an

Islamic feminist perspective. In Surah An-Nisa: 3, Allah Swt. demands justice as the basis for polygamy, not merely the husband's consent. Therefore, Arini's patience is a social construct of female sacrifice as morality rather than genuine piety. Mernissi (1991) refers to this phenomenon as "the veil of male piety" which conceals injustice behind the cloak of piety.

The film *Madu Murni* adopts a humorous tone, yet delivers a sharp social critique. Mustaqim, the husband who claims he wishes to practise polygamy because it is a Sunnah, turns out to be a failure both economically and morally. Mustaqim exploits religious arguments to justify his ego and desires. Meanwhile, Murni, his wife, comes across as rational and realistic. Murni questions her husband's interpretation of religion with a simple yet thought-provoking statement: "If you can't even be fair, why do you want two?" This dialogue echoes the interpretation of Islamic feminism which asserts that justice is an absolute prerequisite in polygamy and that the impossibility of justice makes monogamy more in line with the spirit of Islam. This is also consistent with the following excerpt from the dialogue in *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan*:

"Pras: and you won't be able to be fair to your wives even if you really want to. Because you'll tend to favour one of them. I know the consequences of my decision, and that's between me and Allah.

Hartono: Pras, just admit it. You fancy Mei Rose too, don't you?

Pras: Har, I don't even know her! This isn't about liking her or not. The intention behind this marriage is to save a life.

Hartono: If you want to save lives, just save them. If anything happens, take them to hospital.

Pras: Do you know what it's like when someone jumps to their death (Scene 17)"

This film turns the discourse of patriarchy into self-critique: religious men are portrayed as figures who fail to uphold the moral principles they claim to uphold. *Madu Murni* thus becomes a religious satire that is closest to the values of Islamic feminism, as it positions women as the voice of rational justice.

The film *1 Imam 2 Makmum* (2025) attempts to be more psychological than moral. The character Arman (Fedi Nuril) remarries after his first wife's death, but the shadow of his first wife haunts his new relationship. This conflict appears spiritual, but in reality it reveals a fragile masculinity that never ceases to grieve over the loss. Anika (Amanda Manopo) becomes the victim of the emotional dilemma faced by her husband in this film, as seen in the following screenshot from the film *1 Imam 2 Makmum* at 1:28, which depicts Anika as the victim of this emotional dilemma.

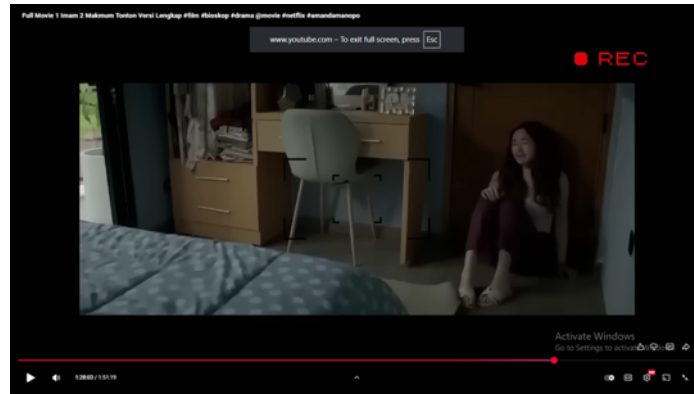


Figure 5. Screenshot from a scene in the film *Film 1 Imam 2 Makmum* (2025).

This dilemma is not an issue that determines the course of the household, but rather a reflection of the husband's failure to be a just imam. The film continues to repeat the old narrative that the fate of a man's love causes a woman's suffering. From an Islamic feminist perspective, the film fails to bring forth the ideas of justice and mutuality. The imam depicted here is not a spiritual guide, but a figure harbouring trauma without moral reflection. This means the film still reinforces a male-centred narrative rather than opening space for women's consciousness.

The Figure of Khadijah Ra. as a Paradigm of Hermeneutics of Justice

Khadijah Ra bint Khuwailid is an archetypal model for Muslim women who are spiritually and economically empowered. Khadijah not only supported the Prophet financially, but also served as a source of moral and intellectual strength during the early days of his prophethood. The relationship between Khadijah Ra. and the Prophet Saw. was egalitarian, based on trust, mutual respect, and equal love. In the context of Islamic feminism, Khadijah Ra. embodies the concepts of justice and mutuality emphasised by Wadud (1999). Khadijah Ra. demonstrates that women can be partners in da'wah without losing their personal autonomy. Thus, the figure of Khadijah Ra. can be interpreted as a hermeneutic of life that corrects contemporary narratives of passive and pious women who are defined by their suffering (Mernissi, 1991).

The values embodied in the figure of Khadijah Ra. include: (1) spiritual independence: actively interpreting worship and faith; (2) emotional equality: being an equal partner, not a subordinate; (3) relational justice: not submitting to gender power dynamics, but rather to moral principles. With these values, the figure of Khadijah Ra. serves as an ethical lens through which to examine how Indonesian cinema constructs—or indeed distorts—the value of gender justice within Islam.

Power Relations and Interpretation in Polygamy Cinema

These four films reveal a common pattern of gender power relations in Indonesian cinema. Polygamy is almost always portrayed from the perspective of men as decision makers. Within a patriarchal discourse, women are depicted as the party whose patience is tested, not as the party possessing the right to determine their own fate. The diagram below illustrates these power relations.

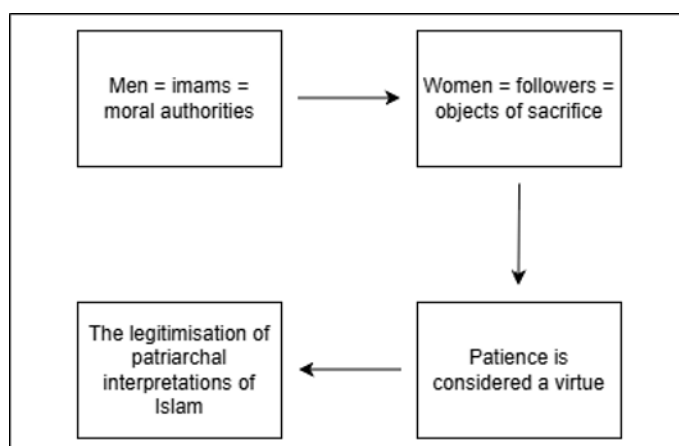


Figure 6. Flowchart of Power Relations in Indonesian Polygamy Cinema.

Within the framework of Islamic feminism, this hierarchy constitutes a distortion of the Islamic principles of justice and compassion. Islam does not position men as absolute authorities; both genders are equal in moral responsibility. Patriarchal interpretations treat women's obedience as an indicator of faith, whereas the Qur'an states: "Verily, the most honourable of you in the sight of Allah Swt. is the most righteous" (Quran 49:13). This verse makes no mention of gender. Piety in Islam is spiritual in nature, not biological or social.

An Islamic feminist hermeneutical analysis shows that polygamy in the Qur'an is not a universal command, but a situational interpretation of the 7th-century social context. Its primary aim was the protection of women and orphans in the aftermath of war, not male superiority (Wadud, 1999; Foucault, 1980). However, Indonesian films have transformed this interpretation into a new moral doctrine that actually perpetuates inequality. Islamic feminism offers an alternative: reading polygamy as a test of moral justice, not a privilege. If justice cannot be achieved, then polygamy becomes a form of spiritual disobedience. Specifically, the synthesis of findings is as shown in the following table.

Findings	Critical Meaning	Connection to Islamic Feminism
Indonesian dominated films by remain patriarchal narratives of polygamy	Women's piety is equated with suffering	This contravenes the principles of 'adl and 'irraḥman

Films such as <i>Berbagi Suami</i> and <i>Madu Murni</i> open up space for critique	Resistance against the hegemony of patriarchal interpretation	Islamic feminist hermeneutics restores contextual meaning
Polygamy is portrayed without the moral context of justice	Religious texts are reduced to tools of social justification	Islamic feminist hermeneutics restores contextual meaning
The figure of Khadijah Ra. is absent from contemporary cinema	Strong women rarely serve as moral role models	Indicating a need for new spiritual representation

Table 3. Synthesis of Research Findings.

From the four findings above, it is evident that the dominance of patriarchal narratives in Indonesian films about polygamy stands in stark contrast to the spirit of justice found in the Qur'an. Films such as *Berbagi Suami* and *Madu Murni* offer cultural resistance through sharp social criticism, whilst *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* and *1 Imam 2 Makmum* tend to reproduce gender inequality. The absence of the figure of Khadijah Ra. in contemporary cinema indicates that the Indonesian film industry has yet to draw upon the rich Islamic tradition of empowered female figures.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes two key points that constitute a theoretical contribution to the development of the discourse on gender equality in Islam and religious cinema in Indonesia. Firstly, from a theoretical-epistemological perspective, this study successfully conceptualises “Khadijah Feminism” as an alternative hermeneutic analytical tool that bridges the divide between secular Western feminism and conservative Islamic theology. Through a fusion of monotheistic faith and socio-economic independence, this concept dismantles the cultural myth that pious women in Islam must be passive, submissive, and accept domestic suffering without any moral veto.

Secondly, the academic implications of this study underscore the need for a radical deconstruction of the ‘religious male gaze’ that dominates Indonesia’s popular culture industry. Fairclough’s CDA analysis and Metz’s semiotics demonstrate that conventional films such as *Surga yang Tak Dirindukan* and *1 Imam 2 Makmum* still commodify religious tenets to perpetuate patriarchal structures. Conversely, the films *Madu Murni* and *Berbagi Suami* demonstrate that cinema can function as an enlightening space for cultural *ijtihad*. This study recommends that Muslim filmmakers and media academics rehabilitate the portrayal of Muslim women on screen: presenting them not as melancholic objects of polygamous patience, but as sovereign, independent, and just moral subjects in accordance with the essence of the Qur’anic message.

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DECLARATIONS

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.5) was used exclusively for language editing, grammatical improvement, and refinement of academic writing. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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